

Claims

We claim:

1. A method for protecting consumer privacy comprising the steps of:
 - obtaining identification information of a plurality of subscribers;
 - obtaining a list of organizations from each individual subscriber of the plurality of subscribers, each list of organizations designating organizations to which privacy instructions are to be communicated on behalf of the individual subscriber;
 - aggregating a list of subscribers wishing to communicate the privacy instructions to a particular organization; and
 - communicating a request to honor the privacy instructions to the particular organization on behalf of those on the list of subscribers.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of obtaining identification information and obtaining a list of organizations include soliciting subscriber input over the internet.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of obtaining identification information and obtaining a list of organizations include subscriber interaction with a web page.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of aggregating includes aggregating a list of subscribers wishing to communicate privacy instructions for each of a plurality of organizations.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of obtaining a list of organizations includes providing each of the plurality of subscribers with a list of organizations from which to select.
6. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of communicating, to each subscriber on the list of subscribers, how the particular organization responded to the step of communicating a request to honor privacy instructions.
7. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of communicating with the particular organization a second time when no response is received to the step of communicating a request to honor privacy instructions.
8. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of allowing each of the plurality of subscribers to change their identification information.
9. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of providing each of the plurality of subscribers with access to information regarding status of the request to honor privacy instructions.
10. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of providing each of the plurality of subscribers with information regarding status of privacy instructions on each organization on the list of organizations obtained from that subscriber.

11. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of providing each individual subscriber the option to vary the privacy instructions.
12. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of accepting a plurality of potential subscribers as subscribers.
13. The method of claim 12 wherein said step of accepting includes receiving payment from each of the plurality of potential subscribers.
14. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of communicating privacy instructions to the particular organization on behalf of those on the list of subscribers periodically.
15. The method of claim 14 further including the steps of:
 - soliciting renewal payment from each of the plurality of subscribers periodically;
 - and
 - ceasing to include those subscriber who fail to provide renewal payment on the list of subscribers.
16. A method of protecting consumer privacy comprising the steps of:
 - obtaining from each individual subscriber of a plurality of subscribers a list of organizations to which the individual subscriber requests instructions to be

communicated, the instructions registering limits on use of information regarding the individual subscriber; and

maintaining a database relating each individual subscriber and organizations to which each individual subscriber has requested that instructions be communicated.

17. The method of claim 16 further comprising the steps of:

generating a communication to a selected organization on behalf of a set of the plurality of subscribers who requested the instructions be communicated to the selected organization, the communication including the instructions registering limits on use of information regarding each subscriber of the set of the plurality of subscribers; and

maintaining information in the database relating each subscriber and organizations to which instructions have been communicated on behalf of the subscriber.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:

obtaining from each individual subscriber an indication of specific requests to be included in the instructions registering limits on use of information regarding the individual subscriber; and

maintaining information in the database relating each subscriber, organization, and the specific requests.

19. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:

repeating the step of generating a communication with respect to each organization in the database as required.

20. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:
obtaining from each of the plurality of subscriber identification data; and
maintaining information in the database relating each subscriber and identification
data.
21. The method of claim 20 wherein selected identification data is included in the
communication to allow the selected organization to identify each subscriber in the set of
the plurality of subscribers who requested instructions be communicated to the selected
organization.
22. The method of claim 20 further comprising the step of allowing subscribers to
change the identification data maintained in the database that related to themselves.
23. The method of claim 20 wherein the database records identification data including
postal addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers of subscribers.
24. The method of claim 20 wherein the database records identification data including
social security numbers of subscribers.
25. The method of claim 19 further comprising the steps of sending to a subscriber
communications indicating organizations to which communications have recently been
sent on behalf of the subscriber.

26. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of maintaining in the database information regarding a response of the selected organization to the communication.

27. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:
generating a second communication to the selected organization in the event that the selected organization fails to respond to the original communication and in the event that the selected organization refuses to honor the instructions; and
maintaining information in the database regarding the organizations for which a second communication is generated.

28. The method of claim 19 further comprising the step of relaying each response received from an organization to the instructions to each subscriber addressed in the response.

29. The method of claim 28 wherein the step of relaying includes sending a communication to a subscriber that includes
an indication that the organization will honor the instructions in the event the organization indicates it will honor the instructions with respect to the subscriber,
information regarding the refusal of the organization to honor the instructions in the event the organization indicates it will not honor the instructions with respect to the subscriber and suggestions to the subscriber regarding additional action that may be taken.

30. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of providing a subscriber information in the database regarding that subscriber.

31. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of obtaining renewal information periodically from each subscriber; and maintaining the renewal information in the database.

32. The method of claim 31 further comprising the steps of:
generating a communication to a selected organization in which instructions regarding limits on use of information is sent on behalf of a set of the plurality of subscribers who requested instructions be communicated to the selected organization after obtaining renewal information; and
maintaining information in the database relating each subscriber and organizations to which instructions have been communicated on behalf of the subscriber.

33. A computer system apparatus for protecting subscriber privacy comprising a computer programmed with software for maintaining a database of information, the database relating individual subscribers of a plurality of subscribers and organizations which the individual subscribers desire to protect personal information, the software including:

a routine enabling the computer to obtain identification information from the plurality of subscribers;

a routine enabling the computer to obtain an indication of which organizations each individual subscriber desires to protect their personal information; and

a routine enabling the computer to generate communications to organizations including instructions to protect personal information on behalf of a plurality of subscribers.

34. The computer system of claim 33 wherein the software further includes a routine enabling the computer to retain and provide access to information regarding which organizations communications have been generated on behalf of each individual subscriber.

35. The computer system of claim 33 wherein the software further includes a routine enabling the computer to accept and record in the database data regarding a response by an organization to the generated communication.

36. The computer system of claim 35 wherein the routine enabling the computer to obtain identification information and the routine enabling the computer to obtain an indication of which organizations each individual subscriber desires to protect their personal information each generate a web page through which subscribers interact with the computer system.